

Twenty-Second Sunday After Pentecost

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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“Honestly, its not for everyone” is the new state motto for...??

Nebraska!

When I heard that on *Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me* this weekend I was cracking up. Being someone who is about to be assigned somewhere in this country for my first call as a pastor, imagining all the places that could possibly be, and continually hearing how much places like Nebraska need pastors, I really appreciate the angle they're taking with this new slogan.

The Nebraska tourism board has come up with a campaign that features similar phrases:

“Lucky for you, there's nothing to do here”

“Famous for our flat, boring landscape”

And these are paired with pictures that seemingly contradict these common assumptions of Nebraska.¹

“Honestly, its not for everyone” not only made me laugh when I heard it, it also made me think about this week's gospel passage.

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2018/10/18/honestly-its-not-for-everyone-says-nebraskas-self-deprecating-new-tourism-campaign/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.e62dbc574a2d

Coming off of last week when we heard about a man who was told by Jesus to sell all that he had and follow him, we are met with another challenging passage.

Jesus and his disciples are nearing Jerusalem. We know what happens in Jerusalem, right? Jesus will be arrested, tried, and killed. We are nearing the cross.

And so things are heating up. Interestingly, we skip a few verses in the lectionary between last week and today. Just two verses before the start of the gospel today, we hear, “They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid.” (Mark 10:32)

They were afraid. The disciples knew from what Jesus had been telling them and how they were experiencing the world around them that Jesus’ life, and the disciples’ life together was limited. And that’s scary.

Fear is a powerful tool. It can lead us to say things or act in ways that protect ourselves and distance others. Fear is isolating.

I think this fear is what led James and John to approach Jesus with the request to be his top disciples, at his right hand and his left hand. Elevating themselves would perhaps give them some feeling of control in what was most certainly a time of feeling anything but control.

Among the disciples, James and John may have very well been feeling Nebraska’s new motto:

Honestly, this discipleship thing is not for everyone.

But as James and John make their—as we see it now—outlandish request, and the disciples grow angry with the brothers, Jesus responds with a question. And it is this question that Pastor Sarah Wilson focuses in on²: Are you able to drink from the same cup as me? Are you able to be baptized in the same waters as me?

² https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3799

We certainly are, reply the brothers.

And Jesus affirms their answer.

Jesus' cup and Jesus' baptism are, indeed, for all of us. *Honestly, its for everyone.*

For you, for me, for Frances and Caleb.

The emphasis on baptism, as Pastor Wilson points out, is what sets this passage apart. Jesus recognizes and affirms the baptisms we know from John the Baptist with water, performed in community. But here, Jesus names the work of the Spirit as something not to be forgotten. Jesus adds this: that who sits at his right and left hand isn't for him to decide. That's the job of the Spirit. It's the job of the Spirit to move and stir.

To guide and direct.

To accompany when we are scared of what is to come, when the temptation is to let fear take over.

It is the job of the Spirit to move us toward those very things we'd like to keep at an arms distance—

Maybe that's going to Nebraska, or maybe that's walking down the street to encounter neighbors who we don't yet know.

That's the baptism into which Jesus was baptized,

That's the baptism into which James and John would be baptized,

That's the baptism into which we are baptized.

And in a day when together with the disciples, we feel the nearing of the cross, we need this gospel message. Together, we have promised to live among God's faithful people, to come together to learn the prayers and the teachings of the church; we've promised to love and serve God, and we've promised to work for justice and peace in all the earth.

We might think we know what that's going to look like. Like James and John, we might wish to position ourselves comfortably, near Jesus. But as we heard last week, as we hear today, and as we are reminded throughout the gospels, Christ's power doesn't come from elevated places of privilege, wealth, and prestige. The cross that Jesus and the disciples walk toward is the power to which we testify in baptism.

The power of humility,

The power of service,

The power of sharing in the suffering of the neighbor.

How appropriate that we celebrate the gift of baptism on this day. Together with Frances and Caleb, with all the saints, we walk toward the cross, empowered by the Spirit who we can rest assured will move and stir in us, but who will never abandon us.